

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

*A Daily Newsletter from Public Affairs, American Embassy*

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## U.N. Security Council Sets Formal Review of Situation in Burma

*U.S. Ambassador Bolton welcomes "significant" decision*

By Judy Aita

Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- U.S. Ambassador John Bolton hailed the Security Council's September 15 decision to schedule a formal review of the situation in Burma, calling the move significant.

"This is a major step forward for President Bush's effort to bring the attention of the international community to the situation inside Burma and its effects on the region," Bolton told journalists after the closed Security Council session. "We intend to press ahead vigorously."

According to the U.N. Charter, the Security Council only addresses issues that pose a threat to international peace and security. Flows of Burmese refugees throughout the Southeast Asia region, illicit narcotics, the risk of HIV/AIDS and the human rights situation inside Burma constitute such a threat, Bolton said.

The United States has pressed for almost a year to have the issue officially placed on the council's agenda. Earlier in September, Bolton said he would ask for a vote if he did not have unanimous support for a formal review.

Faced with strong opposition from China, the council took action September 15 during consultations, voting 10 to 4 with one abstention. "It is fundamentally important that the regime in Burma recognize that it's the other member governments of the U.N. -- the other nations in the world -- that are concerned about their practices," Bolton said.

The first step, Bolton said, was "to get the item formally inscribed on the agenda and follow it with a briefing."

"We're going to watch developments in and around Burma very carefully and we'll make a decision on what our next step will be on that basis," he said. The ambassador added that the council would schedule a briefing by U.N. Undersecretary-General Ibrahim Gambari by the end of September.

Gambari is scheduled to visit Burma, known officially at the United Nations as Myanmar, later this year.

The Security Council decision and the planned briefing are important steps that will strengthen the U.N. official's mission, Bolton said.

According to U.S. officials, the United States plans to

sponsor a resolution calling for an all-inclusive political process and the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. The resolution would also call on the Burmese regime to ensure access and security for humanitarian workers, to take steps to end violence against the ethnic Karen minority, and to address HIV/AIDS and trafficking in drugs and persons.

During the opening of the 61st General Assembly session September 18, U.S. first lady Laura Bush will host a round-table discussion on Burma at the United Nations to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis.

## Bush Calls for U.N. Force To Enter Sudan, Stop Genocide

*Also says Iran should not be allowed to "wait out" the international community*

By Stephen Kaufman

Washington File White House Correspondent

Washington -- President Bush called on the United Nations to take "robust action" in Sudan and deploy a peacekeeping force to provide security in the troubled Darfur regions.

The United Nations' lack of action against the genocide in Darfur has been a source of frustration for him and other Americans, the president said during a September 15 press conference at the White House.

Bush said there are "other alternatives" to continuing to wait for the Sudanese government to invite the peacekeepers into the country, such as "passing a resolution saying we're coming in with a U.N. force in order to save lives."

"I'm frustrated with the United Nations in regards to Darfur," Bush said. "I have said and this government has said there's genocide taking place in the Sudan, and it breaks our collective hearts to know that."

The president said the best way to solve the crisis is to have both a political and a security track in the country, and said he had suggested that NATO provide support and logistics help for the U.N. force.

However, he said, the United Nations "hasn't acted," and added, "I can understand why those who are concerned about Darfur are frustrated. I am."

Bush said he was proud of U.S. humanitarian efforts in Sudan. "We provided by far the vast majority of food and aid," but said he is troubled by reports of escalating violence. "I can understand the desperation people feel for

women being pulled out of these refugee centers and raped. And now is the time for the U.N. to act," he said.

#### 61 ST U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Looking ahead to the opening of the 61st U.N. General Assembly in New York, Bush said he would be addressing the gathering of international leaders to talk about "our obligation to defend civilization and liberty, to support the forces of freedom and moderation throughout the Middle East."

The president also said the United Nations needs better management structures and accountability and he hopes the organization "would support my call to end tyranny in the 21st century."

"I'm going to have a strong message, one that's ... based upon hope and my belief that the civilized world must stand with moderate reformist-minded people and help them realize their dreams. I believe that's the call of the 21st century," he said.

Turning to Iran, Bush said there continues to be a "common" consensus against the country developing nuclear weapons and that he would warn U.N. member states against allowing the Iranian government to stall in its talks with the international community over the issue.

"We need to move the process, and they need to understand we're firm in our commitment. And if they try to drag their feet or, you know, get us to look the other way ... we won't do that," he said. "We're firmly committed in our desire to send a common signal to the Iranian regime."

The president also took questions on his plan to define U.S. obligations under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. He said any legislation passed by Congress must ensure intelligence officers and others conducting the CIA's interrogation program "have no doubt that what they're doing is legal."

"We're trying to set high standards, not ambiguous standards," Bush said.

#### **Laura Bush Hosting White House Literacy Conference**

*"Reading changes lives," first lady says in advance of conference in New York*

By Judy Aita

Washington File Staff Writer

New York -- As world leaders gather for the opening of the U.N. General Assembly, U.S. first lady Laura Bush will be

highlighting the importance of literacy for both individual and national growth by hosting the first White House Conference on Global Literacy September 18 at the New York Public Library.

"Literacy improves the lives of mothers and children. Literacy boosts economies. And literacy helps people make good, informed decisions about their health," she said in a conference announcement.

The conference will underscore the need for sustained global and national leadership in promoting literacy and will encourage greater international and private-sector involvement in literacy programs, according to Sonya Medina, director of projects for the White House Conference on Global Literacy. It also will highlight successful programs supported by the United States, UNESCO and private or local groups around the world.

Over 60 first ladies and spouses of leaders and education ministers are expected to attend, Medina said.

According to UNESCO, 780 million adults, two-thirds of whom are women, are unable to read. Another 100 million children worldwide are not in school. Eighty-five percent of the world's illiterate live in just 35 countries that are concentrated in regions of high poverty. In Washington, the first lady's chief of staff, Anita McBride, said representatives from 30 of these countries will attend the conference. The African region will be heavily represented, she added.

Laura Bush is honorary ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade. A former public school teacher and librarian, she has used her positions as first lady of Texas and first lady of the United States to highlight the importance of reading and education, especially for women and girls. Her dedication and support of literacy programs is seen in such projects as the first National Book Festival in Washington in 2001 and the teacher recruitment program Teach for America.

The first lady often recalls that as a child she loved listening to her mother read to her. Over her lifetime, she has realized how important that experience was and how critical such a simple gesture between mother and child is for children all over the world and the countries in which they live. In 2005, she visited 27 countries and was able to see reading programs at work in many places.

"Literacy is vital to strong, free societies. And reading changes lives," she said recently. "Mothers who can read raise children who can read. They can also make informed decisions that protect the health of their families and can participate in local economies. Literacy strengthens families

just as it strengthens communities and societies."

Panels and discussions at the conference will focus on those three areas: mother-child literacy, literacy for health and literacy for economic self-sufficiency. Nine programs that are easily replicable will be showcased.

#### MOTHER -- A CHILD'S FIRST TEACHER

The first panel, entitled "Mother-Child Literacy and Intergenerational Learning," features programs that focus on mothers, children's first teachers. When mothers learn to read, they can impart those skills to their children, beginning a cycle of literacy that continues from one generation to the next.

Even in the United States, one-third of the children begin school without basic skills, Dr. Perri Klass, president of the U.S. Reach Out and Read National Center, said at a press conference September 14. Her program links health care and literacy by giving books to mothers at doctors' offices and clinics at least twice a year and encouraging them to read to their babies and young children.

The mother-child panel will also feature Maria Diarra Keita, director of the Institute for Popular Education in Mali, and Florence Molefe, facilitator of the Family Literacy Project in South Africa. The White House's McBride said there is excitement among conference organizers about Molefe's success in bringing literacy to areas where there is no running water or electricity. "Small steps in the least likely places" can inspire other educators in impoverished areas of the world, she said.

The second panel, "Literacy for Health" focuses on the importance of reading so adults can not only make informed decisions about their family's health, but also do basic things such as understand instructions on a medicine bottle.

In Afghanistan's rural communities women often are not allowed to leave their homes to attend school, said Hasina Mojadidi, instructional development coordinator for Learning for Life. Her program began working with women at home teaching basic health issues. As the program has progressed, she said, men have seen the value and encouraged not only their wives, but also their daughters, to study. "Mrs. Bush stands with the women of Afghanistan," said McBride. In 2005, the first lady visited the Women's Teacher Training Institute, where men and women teachers are trained in separate classrooms.

"In many cases, it's the man who needs to be educated, and cultures need to be changed, but it needs to be done with the people's support," said Randall Tobias, head of the U.S.

Agency for International Development, a partner in hosting the literacy conference.

Other health-related literacy projects will be presented by Gonzalo Fiorilo of Bolivia, and by Salah Sabri Sebeh of Egypt.

#### LEARNING BASIC BUSINESS SKILLS

The third panel features programs that help women learn basic business skills that generate income, foster independence, and boost local economies.

In Burkina Faso, 90 percent of women are illiterate and 85 percent of women are agricultural workers, said Koumba Boly Barry, coordinator for development and cooperation, Program for Literacy and Training. Her program targets women in agriculture, helping them develop income-generating activities and teaching needed skills.

Both men and women are beginning to see the difference education is making, Barry said. "We also show them that as they become successful, the country is becoming more successful."

The panel on literacy's effect on economic well-being will also feature Regina Celia Esteves de Siqueira, who is chief executive of a nonprofit literacy program in Brazil, and Krishna Mohan Rao, an education expert for the government of Andhra Pradesh, India, who will talk about award-winning programs in India.

McBride said UNESCO's director general, Koichiro Matsuura, will announce follow-up, regional literacy conferences that will take place during the next two years. She said she was certain that there would be such a follow-up conference in Africa.

#### United States Promotes Religious Freedom for All, Rice Says

*2006 report examines 197 countries' commitment to religious freedom*

By Michelle Austein

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington - "The United States seeks to promote religious freedom and tolerance and build a more peaceful world for the peoples of all faiths," Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said at the release of the International Religious Freedom Report September 15.

The U.S. Department of State released the eighth annual report to Congress September 15. The 2006 report examines 197 countries' commitment to advancing religious freedom.

The United States hopes the report will serve as a resource for those who share concerns about religious freedom, Rice said. "We also hope that it will serve as a source of encouragement to those whose plight is documented in the report and whose right to believe and practice and worship as they choose is still denied by their governments."

Events over the past year, including the incidents surrounding the printing of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in European newspapers, "have shown the need to go beyond the protection of religious freedom in law to a concerted effort to create the conditions for harmony, mutual understanding and respect within our societies," said Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom John Hanford.

Many governments are taking important steps to improve religious freedom, according to Hanford. For example, in Afghanistan the government is seeking to uphold constitutional guarantees of religious freedom despite a long-standing culture of intolerance. In Turkmenistan, additional religious groups have been able to obtain legal status.

The report also documents governments that routinely suppress religious freedom, including those of Eritrea and China, which use repressive registration laws as a means of restricting nonapproved religions or outlaw certain faiths entirely, Hanford said. In particular, Hanford said, Uzbekistan has further tightened its laws on religion, and congregations have been harassed and deregistered. Some Muslims in that nation have been arrested inappropriately, Hanford added.

The fifth anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks was a reminder that "the entire world is threatened by the extremist ideology of hate and bigotry and religious intolerance," Rice said.

"Religious freedom is deeply rooted in our principals and our history as a nation. And it is now integral to our efforts to combat terrorism and the ideology of hatred that fuels it," Rice said.

### **United States Very Concerned About Death of Turkmen Journalist**

*State Department calls on Turkmenistan to provide results of Muradova autopsy*

By Jeffrey Thomas

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has expressed concern about the death in a Turkmen prison of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) correspondent Ogulsapar Muradova.

"We are very concerned about the death of a prisoner in the government of Turkmenistan's custody and are working to gather the facts," the State Department spokesman said in a statement issued September 14.

Muradova was arrested June 18, the third RFE/RL Turkmen correspondent to be arrested in 2006. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty is a private, international communications service to Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central and Southwestern Asia funded by the U.S. Congress through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

"The exact circumstances of Ms. Muradova's death remain unclear, and we call upon the Government of Turkmenistan to provide the results of the autopsy they conducted," the State Department spokesman said. "We will remain closely engaged through our Mission regarding this situation."

The statement noted that Muradova was serving a six-year sentence for illegal possession of ammunition but added that "the Turkmen judicial system lacks independence, and Ms. Muradova's trial was conducted without due process and behind closed doors."

U.S. Embassy staff in Ashgabat met frequently with the Muradova family during the trial and after her sentencing, according to the statement, which added, "We wish to extend our deepest condolences on their loss."

Chargé d'Affaires ad interim Jennifer Brush plans to attend Muradova's funeral September 15, the State Department said.

The U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors, an independent federal agency that oversees U.S. international broadcasting including RFE/RL, called for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into Muradova's death.

"Mrs. Muradova will be remembered for her courage and dedication to reporting the truth to the people of Turkmenistan," said Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, in remarks reported by RFE/RL.

RFE/RL acting President Jeff Trimble said, "This is a terrible outcome of a long ordeal and a shocking indictment of the Turkmen regime's callous and inhumane treatment of the people it rules. All of us at RFE/RL mourn the untimely loss of a colleague. Our hearts go out to Ogulsapar Muradova's family."



Trimble added, "We will keep her memory alive by carrying on her work, continuing through our broadcasting to bring truth to Turkmen citizens and to be their voice to the outside world."

RFE/RL is reporting that relatives who eventually saw Muradova's body "have been quoted as saying it bore signs of violence."

The long prison sentences for Muradova and two other Turkmen rights activists drew criticism from Europe's largest governmental human rights organization, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In a statement issued August 28, Miklos Haraszti, the OSCE representative on freedom of the media, condemned the lack of transparency in the handling of the cases of Annakurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khajiev, and Muradova.

"Turkmenistan did not allow observers to monitor this case. The international community is right to worry that the defendants are in trouble because of their journalistic and human rights activities," Haraszti said.

International human rights groups also condemned the sentences of up to seven years as outrageous.

The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) called on the international community to denounce the sentences "and take further steps to demonstrate that such show trials ending in brutal sentences of human rights defenders and journalists have no place in the OSCE or in the civilized world. If there is business as usual with such a state, then citizens who want to exercise basic rights are not safe anywhere."

On August 25, Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RWB) expressed disgust at the "absurd, unjust and disgraceful" sentence, and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) condemned the trial as a "mockery of justice."

### **U.S. Officials Urge China To Improve Nonproliferation Efforts**

*Say Beijing's best strategic interest lies in enforcing international norms*

By Susan Krause

Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- China must demonstrate greater leadership in addressing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, officials from the Bush administration said in

testimony before a federal government commission September 14.

Recent events, including the July 4 test-launch of several missiles by North Korea and the militant Islamic resistance movement Hezbollah's use of Chinese-designed "Silkworm" cruise missiles in strikes against Israeli naval vessels on July 15 demonstrate the effect of China's behavior, according to Peter Rodman, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

Despite repeated assurances from the Chinese government that it opposes the proliferation of materials and technology used in the production and delivery of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the United States government remains concerned about lapses in enforcement, says Paula DeSutter, assistant secretary of state for verification, compliance and implementation.

Rodman and DeSutter appeared at a hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a congressionally mandated body charged with monitoring the national security implications of trade and economic ties between the United States and China.

"China's nonproliferation efforts have shown some improvement over the past several years," DeSutter said. "Unfortunately, Chinese entities' record of transferring WMD and missile technologies and materials -- and the record of the Chinese government's enforcement of its own laws and regulations to stem these transfers -- remains unsatisfactory."

### **SERIAL PROLIFERATORS**

Chinese entities, including state-owned companies, have transferred weapons technologies to countries around the world, the officials said, including "states of concern" such as Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Burma, Zimbabwe, Cuba and Venezuela.

"In some of these cases, Chinese authorities declare that they have taken direct action against firms and tightened export controls to close loopholes, but these measures are uneven and the problematic activity continues," Rodman said.

DeSutter said the United States particularly is concerned about "serial proliferators," a limited number of entities that, through repeated actions, have been responsible for much of the proliferation problem.

In June, the U.S. government imposed sanctions on four Chinese entities pursuant to Executive Order 13382, which blocks U.S.-based property of WMD proliferators and their

supporters. The entities -- Beijing Alite Technologies Company Ltd. (ALCO), LIMMT Economic and Trade Company Ltd., China Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC), and China National Precision Machinery Import-Export Corporation (CNPMIEC) were designated as suppliers of financial, material, technological or other support for Iran's missile programs.

Pressure from the United States has been an essential factor in improving China's behavior, DeSutter said.

"The imposition, or even the mere threat of sanctions, can be an influential tool for changing behavior, as few countries or companies wish to be labeled publicly as irresponsible," she said.

#### TIES WITH IRAN, NORTH KOREA

China has long-standing relationships with both Iran and North Korea, Rodman told the commission, but its actions in the proliferation area seem "dangerously shortsighted."

The United States has been concerned that China has engaged in significant transfers of conventional weapons to Iran and has assisted Iran in developing ballistic missile, nuclear, and chemical programs.

"This is not consistent with China's natural interest in Middle East stability," Rodman said.

China's decision to support U.N. Security Council Resolution 1696, which demands that Iran suspend enrichment of uranium by August 31, suggested that it was willing to confront the potential threat posed by Iran's nuclear activities, he said.

"Unfortunately, China has joined Russia in a reluctance to back up this vote with action," he said.

Historically, China has supplied military technology to North Korea, Rodman said, providing dual-use missile-related items, raw materials and other forms of assistance well into the 1990s.

In more recent times, he added, China has been a major supplier of food and fuel to North Korea, and has played a leading role in the Six-Party Talks seeking to end nuclear programs on the Korean Peninsula.

"We recognize and appreciate the important contributions China has made in recent years to organize and host the Six-Party Talks," Rodman said. "Nonetheless, China, as the country with the most leverage over North Korea, can and should do more."

North Korea's missile tests "demonstrate that China's past tolerance of North Korea's provocative behavior has indirectly eroded the very stability it claims to seek," Rodman said. He welcomed China's decision to vote in favor of Security Council Resolution 1695, condemning the launches.

Rodman urged China to reassess its relations with Pyongyang and Teheran.

"United States policy is to encourage China not only to take its proper place in the international system, but to take on its appropriate share of international leadership," he said. "A commitment to peace and stability is an important component of that."

In the cases of both Iran and North Korea, Rodman cautioned, "the dangers to regional and global stability are increasing, and the time is right for Beijing to think hard about its relationships and its interests. We believe that China's approach for too long has been one of shielding these regimes from the consequences of their dangerous behavior."

#### A STRATEGIC INTEREST IN NONPROLIFERATION ENFORCEMENT

Rodman acknowledged that China is taking steps to improve its export controls and reduce its transfers of WMD-related technologies.

"The fact remains, however, that Chinese entities today remain key sources of transfers of arms, WMD- and missile-related equipment and technologies including dual-use technology and related military capabilities, to countries of concern," he said. "These transfers do considerable harm to regional stability."

He urged China to address areas of concern by strengthening its export licensing procedures, border controls and detection capabilities, and by implementing more rigorous enforcement and prosecution.

"We take China at its word that it has an interest in stability," he said, "and it is our hope that China will come to the calculation that its best strategic interest lies in enforcing international non-proliferation norms."

DeSutter acknowledged that U.S. engagement with China on nonproliferation issues could be "contentious." However, U.S. concerns with China "are not irremediable," she said.

**Transcript: Journalists Discusses Challenges, Pressures in Reporting the News***USINFO Webchat transcript, September 15*

Deborah Potter, an executive director of NewsLab (an online resource center for journalists in Washington that she founded in 1998) and a featured columnist, responds to questions in a September 15 USINFO Webchat about the fundamentals of journalism as it is practiced in a democratic system.

Following is the transcript:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
Bureau of International Information Programs  
USINFO Webchat Transcript

Guest: Deborah Potter  
Date: September 15, 2006

Deborah Potter and Ugandan Journalists

IIP Moderator: Welcome to our USINFO Webchat with Ms. Deborah Potter. Our webchat will begin in just a few minutes at 9:00 a.m. Washington/4:00 p.m. Kampala time.

We are already receiving your questions. Please submit each question separately.

Deborah Potter: Good day to everyone in Kampala. Thanks for inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

Question [Zubedah]: Hello Deborah, what tips can you give on professionalizing broadcast journalism in developing countries, which at the moment is looked at more as a source of entertainment than a provider for credible news and information? - Zubedah

Answer [Deborah Potter]: This is a difficult issue to solve. First, the journalists themselves have to want to change the way their work is perceived. Then they need the support of their managers and, I think, some training. It is difficult to establish or regain credibility with an audience that doesn't expect it. But I think it can be done, over time. It would help if journalists would agree on some professional standards and publicize them so the audience can hold them accountable if they fall short.

Q [Zubedah]: In Uganda, Radio seems to be the cheapest source of news and information and is also said to have the widest coverage in terms of audience. The problem is that most radio stations, which are mainly commercialised, tend to allocate a maximum of 5 minutes for news which lacks freshness and quality content as the day goes by. In your opinion, how best can radio news be made more interesting

without necessarily shortening it? - Zubedah

A: Radio is a terrific medium for reaching a wide audience, but radio newsrooms are often under-staffed. To keep the news fresh and interesting throughout the day, radio journalists have to collect new information. This sounds obvious, but it's amazing how often this basic requirement is ignored. Even if you don't have a staff of reporters you can send into the field during the day, you need a way to get new information on the air. If you can reach people by telephone and record your calls you can get fresh "sound bites" on the news. At a minimum, radio presenters should be rewriting their newscasts every hour to keep the information fresh.

Q [Geoffrey]: Uganda's media enjoy some press freedom. However, the state has intentionally maintained oppressive laws, though applied selectively. Laws like sedition, prohibition of importation of publications, the 1995 press and media statute and lately the terrorism act under which a journalist can be sentenced to death. The media has for the last 20 years of NRM rule not managed to have those laws scrapped.

What is your advice/comment on this?

A: Press freedom is always a moving target. Journalists want more of it, but it's difficult to secure. One problem, I think, is that journalists are either too busy doing their daily jobs or are uncomfortable with the idea of lobbying for legislative change, so they just make do with the current situation. It's helpful to organize local journalism groups that can take on this task. My guess is that government entities don't respond particularly well to being chastised about this by outside groups.

If possible, try to get the public involved in supporting greater press freedom. News media in the United States, for example, have devoted one week each year for the past several years to reporting on freedom of information. You can learn more about that at [www.sunshineweek.org](http://www.sunshineweek.org) (<http://www.sunshineweek.org/>).

Q [Henry]: Hi Deborah and all colleagues in Uganda. First, thanks to Deborah for writing that wonderful guide.

A: Thanks so much, Henry. I am glad you are finding it useful.

IIP Moderator: Ms. Potter is the author of the State Department's new "Handbook of Independent Journalism" (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>). The handbook is available free online in HTML and PDF (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/journalism.pdf>) format.



Q [Henry]: I can't agree more with almost everything that Deborah says in her book, except to ask, Why shouldn't Editors themselves get time off once in a while to report?

A: I think that's a great idea, as well. In fact, I've recommended to many newsrooms that they institute a kind of "job swapping" arrangement so people can experience how other people do their jobs. It can be eye-opening for a reporter to see what editors go through, and it can be a good reminder to editors of what their reporters are up against if they can get out and do some reporting once in a while.

Q [Henry]: Much as the basic principles in journalism hold for print, broadcast etc. What makes online reporting different for the traditional media channels?

A: One thing reporters do differently for online as opposed to broadcast or print is to think differently about their stories from the start. They need to realize that the medium really does change the message. Online news consumers are looking for lots of different things: interactive elements, graphics, maps, video, slide shows, and so forth. Reporters need to collect information they can use to create those kinds of online extras. That doesn't mean they have to experts at actually producing the online elements, but they need to understand what CAN be done so they come back with the necessary materials.

A few other things that journalists should know about the online audience:

They tend to be "skimmers." It may be tempting to write long stories for online use because there's no limit to what you can put on the Web. But surveys of users show they tend to browse for information, so very long stories are not that appealing. In addition, headlines and captions are even more important online than they are in print.

Beyond that, journalists writing for online media should provide access to more information in the form of hyperlinks.

IIP Moderator: Deborah, for students of journalism and young journalists, what personal and professional skills should they hone as they enter the profession?

A: I think young journalists should be curious and courageous -- both personally and professionally. Many young people I meet who say they want to be journalists don't seem to care much about the news. They think it would be an interesting job, but they don't know what it really takes to do it well. Journalists have to want to know what's really going on so they can keep the public

informed. That means they shouldn't stop asking questions once they get the first or second answer. And they need courage because this isn't an easy job. They'll face obstacles and they may get discouraged. If they know why they really want to do this job, to seek the truth and inform people so they can make good decisions in their daily lives, they can overcome those obstacles.

Journalists also should be fair-minded people. They have to be able to put aside their own beliefs and listen to those of others so they can fairly represent them in the media. They have to care, deeply, about accuracy and be willing to check and re-check information to make sure they have it right.

And one more thing: They have to be willing to work hard!

Q [Irene]: Hello Deborah, based on my experience, I am inclined to think of 'independent media' as a fallacy, even an oxymoron. I tend to regard the independence of the media in terms of degree rather than absolutes. Is it practically possible for the media to divorce itself from the competing interests -- political, financial and even personal -- that have to be weighed every single day?

A: Perhaps another way of looking at this is to think of independence as a goal, not a given. I agree that it is a constant struggle to maintain an independent press. There is always pressure on journalists to influence news coverage, from governments or owners or sponsors. That can lead to self-censorship, with journalists avoiding certain kinds of stories because they're just too controversial.

Instead of divorcing themselves from competing interests, I think journalists need to be aware of them and to ask themselves how they can report every story in an independent way. Sometimes they may need to disclose to the public what's been going on behind the scenes, so the public can judge for itself just how independent the news media are.

IIP Moderator: Legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow is the subject of the State Department's online booklet, "About America: Edward R. Murrow, Journalism At Its Best (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/murrow/>)." The publication is available for free download.

Q [PETER]: Thanks Deborah. What would you think are some of the greatest challenges facing African journalism in the 21st Century?

A: African journalists face many of the same challenges their colleagues face around the world to different degrees. In addition to the pressures from outside influences, they have to adapt to the needs of a changing audience and new media and the economics of the news business. I think one

of the greatest challenges we all face is to maintain our credibility with the public so they will support us in our struggles.

Q [Henry]: I am sure Deborah has met many journalists from Africa, What are their major inadequacies and their strengths as compared to their American colleagues?

A: I hesitate to answer this because I try to avoid sweeping generalizations! Again, I think we all face similar challenges to different degrees. Some journalists overcome them; some don't. It's not about geography, it's about individual effort and institutional support no matter where you look around the world.

Q [PETER]: Overall, it is increasingly becoming difficult for journalists in Africa to stay in the profession perhaps due to some of the pressures you have outlined. How does one hang in there? Any tips please?

A: I see this phenomenon of "burn out" everywhere I go. It is difficult to maintain the energy and passion for the business when you are so often thwarted. One thing that can keep you fresh is working on a project or story that you care deeply about. You still have to do your daily work, but if you can also do a little bit along the way on a story that matters to you can keep the passion alive. Another thing that helps is having the support of colleagues. Journalists need to encourage each other.

When you get together, try not to spend the entire time complaining about how bad things are. Look at the good work you and others have been able to do despite the pressures, and let it inspire you to do more. Trainings, workshops and informal gatherings to share good work can do wonders to remind journalists why we got into this business in the first place. We know it wasn't the high salary or the great working conditions, right? A reporter I know talks about creating a "conspiracy of excellence," by which she means a group of journalists who challenge each other to keep doing good work even when their bosses don't support them. It can be energizing to have others whose work you respect push you to do even better.

Thanks for asking! NewsLab (<http://www.newslab.org/>) is a small non-profit devoted to journalism training. Our main focus is on broadcast journalism, but I also do workshops for print and online journalists. We have lots of resources for journalists available online and I hope you will find them useful.

IIP Moderator: Can you tell us a bit about your organization, NewsLab?

A: I have enjoyed our conversation today. Thanks again for

inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

IIP Moderator: We would like to thank all of our participants in Uganda and Ms. Potter for taking the time to Webchat with us today. The Webchat is now closed.

A transcript of today's Webchat will be available on our  
USINFO Webchat Station  
(<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>)  
within one business day.

(While guests are chosen for their expertise, the views expressed by the guests are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.)

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